



Greater Palm Springs Pride

NEWS RELEASE

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(Editors notes - Details for each honoree can be read online at <http://bit.ly/2014details>. Photos available at <http://bit.ly/ps2014photos>)

Greater Palm Springs Pride Announces 2014 Pride Honorees and Community Grand Marshals

LGBT civil rights attorney, pioneering businesswoman and first openly transgender trial judge in the United States top the slate of activists and community leaders to be recognized with Spirit of Stonewall Awards

PALM SPRINGS, CA (August 20, 2014) Greater Palm Springs Pride announces the recipients of its 2014 Pride Honors Awards. The prestigious Pride Honors are presented annually to individuals in order to recognize the work they have put into raising awareness and furthering the causes of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and their allies. The awards will be presented at a ceremony on October 10, at the Hyatt Palm Springs.

Lifetime Achievement Awards will be presented to the nation's leading transgender advocate for LGBT rights Shannon Price Minter and businesswoman pioneer Mariah Hanson. Recognized for enhancing the community through the arts, the 2014 Organization of the Year is The Desert Rose Playhouse. Fiona Foyston and Pat Bergmann, along with Tony Marchese, will be recognized with Spirit of Stonewall Community Service Awards.

Pennie L. Feehan and Gordon Elkins will be honored as Volunteers of the Year, and Riverside County Sheriff Chief Deputy Raymond Gregory and community activist Wes Rankins will be recognized with the Spirit of Pride Award for advancing equality, promoting diversity and celebrating the strength and talent of the LGBT community. The 2014 Friend of Pride Award will be presented to student advocate Tori St. Johns and in recognition of her trailblazing work as the first openly transgender trial judge in the United States, Superior Court Judge Vicky Kowlakowski will be the 2014 Spirit of Stonewall Special Guest.

The Community Grand Marshals recognized for their positive and lasting impact represent two generations of volunteerism and service in the community. Alexis Ortega is part of a new generation that's dedicated to building a stronger and more vibrant community and Thomas Smith is recognized for thirty years of community service, leadership in the leather community and as an award-winning author.

PRIDE HONORS AWARDS October 10, 2014 (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.)

Greater Palm Springs Pride
777 N. Palm Canyon Dr., Ste 102, Palm Springs, CA 92262

The prestigious Palm Springs Pride Honors Awards are presented annually to individuals to honor the work they have put into furthering the causes of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and their allies. The awards reception will take place October 10, 2014, 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm at the Hyatt Palm Springs located at 285 N. Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs. Tickets are available online at bit.ly/pshonors14. Proceeds from the reception will go to the Pride LGBT Landmark Monument Fund to establish a Wall of Honor landmark monument to honor and remember LGBT community members.

ABOUT GREATER PALM SPRINGS PRIDE

Greater Palm Springs Pride (pspride.org) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit community enhancement organization founded to promote the public education and public awareness of individual rights and civil liberties of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and to promote the history, diversity and future prosperity of the Greater Palm Springs LGBT community.

Palm Springs Pride has been a tireless advocate for equality and diversity for twenty-eight years. "I'm Pride. Stonewall 45" is this year's Pride celebration theme. For information about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities, visit the web site at: PSPride.org. The 2014 Palm Springs Pride Celebration is November 7 – 9 and will take place in downtown Palm Springs on Palm Canyon Dr.

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The Spirit of Stonewall Lifetime Achievement Award is presented to recognize an individual whose lifetime body of work has left a lasting major imprint on the LGBT community. The recipients for 2014 are **Shannon Price Minter and Mariah Hanson**.

Shannon Price Minter's impact on the LGBT community is perhaps greater than any other single individual over the last twenty years and Greater Palm Springs Pride recognizes him as the leading transgender advocate for LGBT rights in the nation with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Minter received his J.D. from Cornell Law School in 1993 and his legal career, work on behalf of and service to the LGBT community has been nothing but extraordinary.

Minter was the first transgender person to argue before the California Supreme Court. He was lead counsel for same-sex couples in the landmark California marriage equality case which held that same-sex couples have the fundamental right to marry and that laws that discriminate based on sexual orientation are inherently discriminatory and subject to the highest level of constitutional scrutiny.

Minter was the lead attorney for the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) in *Christian Legal Society v. Hastings*, a U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding student group policies prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and rejecting the argument that such policies violated a student group's rights to freedom of speech, religion, and association. NCLR represented Hastings Outlaw, an LGBT student group who intervened to help defend the nondiscrimination policy.

If awards paint a picture of the individual, Minter is a national treasure. In 2009, Minter was named a California Lawyer of the Year by California Lawyer. In 2008, he was named among six Lawyers of the Year by Lawyers USA and among California's Top 100 Lawyers by the legal publication The Daily Journal. He also received the 2008 Dan Bradley Award from the National Gay and Lesbian Bar Association for outstanding work in marriage cases and was the recipient of the Cornell Law School Exemplary Public Service Award. In 2005, Minter was one of 18 people to receive the Ford Foundation's "Leadership for a Changing World" award. In 2004, he was awarded an Honorary Degree from the City University of New York School of Law for his advocacy on behalf of same-sex couples and their families. Shannon has also received the Anderson Prize Foundation's Creating Change Award by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Distinguished National Service Award from GAYLAW, the bar association for LGBT lawyers, law students, and legal professionals in Washington, D.C., Cornell Law School's Exemplary Public Service Award, the Unity Award from Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom, the Advocacy Award from the San Francisco Bar Association, and the Justice Award from Equality California.

Minter has served over twenty years as the Legal Director of NCLR, one of the nation's leading advocacy organizations for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

The 2014 Spirit of Stonewall Lifetime Achievement Award is presented to **Mariah Hanson** the pioneering businesswoman. Mariah Hanson has come a long way from working a newspaper route as a teenager to creating the most successful cultural tourism and leisure travel event for lesbians - the Club Skirts Dinah Shore Weekend in Palm Springs, California. Twenty-four years ago Mariah created what has become the largest lesbian event in the world and as managing producer, she delivers a five-day one-stop destination and international world-class event packed with non-stop activities, a series of huge pool parties, night entertainment, live concerts, and comedy shows.

Hanson is recognized for creating a life-changing experience for myriads of women who travel to Palm Springs from all over the world to attend her events. She has served on the board of directors for Equality

California and lends her support to a variety of organizations, including GLAAD, NOH8, The Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center, and the Human Rights Commission. She also currently writes for The Huffington Post "Gay Voices".

An avid horseback rider, Mariah Hanson dedicates her spare time trail riding through the mountains around Palm Springs and has recently signed up to earn her certificate in equine therapy, the practice of using horses to help heal people.

The Spirit of Stonewall Organization of the Year Award acknowledges outstanding persons, organizations, events, or businesses that are identified as deserving of special recognition. **The Desert Rose Playhouse** is the 2014 Spirit of Stonewall Organization of the Year recognized by Palm Springs Pride for enriching the LGBT community through the arts.

Desert Rose Productions is the non-profit organization formed by Artistic Director Jim Strait and Managing Director Paul Taylor to serve the LGBT community by producing and presenting plays, musicals, and other entertainments of value and meaning to resident and visiting LGBT theatregoers. While the primary goal of the company is to serve the LGBT community, the company produces and presents a wide variety of attractions that also appeal to "gay-friendly" audience members who value intelligent, literate and adventurous theatre of high quality.

Beyond stage productions, the company supports the community by providing the Playhouse for rental or selected usage by local non-profit LGBT and gay-friendly organizations, providing show tickets to The Desert AIDS Project to enable their clients to attend performances they otherwise could not afford to see, and donating ticket packages to local charities for fundraising activities. The company also presented staged readings of two new gay plays as part of the Tolerance Education Center's Gay Pride event in June.

The Spirit of Pride Award is presented to individuals who enhance the quality of life in the region by raising awareness to advance equality, promote diversity or celebrate the strength or talent of the LGBT community. The 2014 Spirit of Pride Award honorees are Chief Deputy Raymond Gregory and Wes Rankins.

Raymond Gregory is a long-time resident of the Coachella Valley and a twenty-four year veteran with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department where he serves as Assistant Sheriff and as the Department's Liaison to the LGBT Community. In 2010, Chief Gregory became the first openly gay man to ever serve the sheriff's department as police chief of Coachella and La Quinta.

Chief Deputy Gregory was instrumental in seeking input from equal rights organizations and the transgender community as the state's second largest sheriff's department crafted a policy addressing how the jail and corrections department interacts with transgender individuals. In May 2014, under his oversight, the Riverside County Sheriff's Department Correction Division updated its sexual assault policy to reflect new guidelines on transgender and other LGBT inmate-related issues.

A familiar site in the community, Chief Deputy Gregory has represented the County Sheriff's Office in the annual Palm Springs Pride Parade for many years and he's an avid volunteer for Safe Schools Desert Cities. Gregory and his husband, Eric Ornelas, have two sons and one grandson.

Wes Rankins is recognized for his commitment to advance equality and promote diversity through his service with the Palm Springs Black History Committee, the City of Palm Springs Human Rights Commission and Palm Springs Police Department LGBT Outreach committee.

As a young man, Wes was raised to stand up for what you believe in and to treat everyone equally. He

continues to be guided by these values with his service in the community, including serving as vice president of the Palm Springs Black History Committee. Wes has worked to raise awareness of the Palm Springs Black History Committee and promote inclusiveness at all Black History events where he strives to make everyone welcome. In addition to his officer duties on the committee, Wes has served as chairman of the organization's annual awards gala, wine tasting and art exhibit events. As chairman of the art exhibit, Wes was responsible for securing the first ever full African American art exhibition at the Palm Springs Art Museum.

While serving on the Human Rights Commission, the commission played a key role with the City of Palm Springs to initiate a diversity-training program for all city employees. Wes is also proud of the commission's work promoting anti-gay bullying programs and achieving a perfect index score in the annual Human Rights Municipal Equality Index (MEI). The MEI examines the laws, policies, and services of municipalities and rates them on the basis of their inclusivity of LGBT people who live and work there.

Wes also serves on the Pam Springs Police Department LGBT Outreach committee.

The Spirit of Stonewall Community Service Award recognizes individuals, a couple or organization within the LGBT community that has made a noticeable and positive impact on the community. The 2014 Spirit of Stonewall Community Service Award is presented to **Fiona Foyston, Pat Bergmann and Tony Marchese**.

Fiona Foyston and Pat Bergmann met after a cabaret show while waiting in the valet line at Dinks in 2010. After many morning coffee house meetings they had their first date at a Halloween event where they both dressed as men. Looking beyond the costume you will find a community treasure that always comes as a twosome. Fiona and Pat are involved in more than a dozen organizations offering their time, talent and get it done attitude. It all started with Fiona volunteering for Desert AIDS Project (DAP) and Pat volunteering as the staging manager of the annual Palm Springs Pride parade.

Together they have served AIDS Assistance Program, Cabot Pueblo Museum, Community Emergency Response Team, Cinema Diverse, Coyote Stageworks, DAP, Desert Outreach Foundation, Greater Palm Springs Pride, Human Rights Campaign, Mizell Senior Center, Modernism Week, Palm Canyon Theater, Palm Springs International Film Festival, and the World Cup Pentathlon.

Fiona and Pat are devoted to serving the community because it's their way to support the vital humanitarian efforts in the region. They also enjoy meeting people who share their concerns and interests. Fiona came to Palm Springs in 2000 from Olympia, Washington and has three children and five grandchildren. Pat is a native Californian living in Palm Springs since 1994 and has two adult sons and three dogs.

Tony Marchese is recognized with the Spirit of Stonewall Community Service Award for his strong commitment to giving back and supporting the community. In addition to serving as president of the Palm Springs Desert Resorts Restaurant Week, Tony serves on the board of directors for the Aids Assistance Program and the Palm Springs Hospitality Association.

Tony is the co-owner of Trio Restaurant and The Purple Room Restaurant & Stage which serve as venues for a variety of charity events for nonprofit organizations including Trio's annual wine dinner to benefit Palm Springs High School Arts Program and "Hollywood's Biggest Night" Oscar party for AIDS Assistance Program. Having raised \$65,000 over the last four years, Tony has lead the charge over and over again for Trio to be the top-producing fundraiser for Dining Out For Life, an annual dining event raising money for client services at Desert AIDS Project.

Being a philanthropist at heart Tony is driven to support dozens of events, programs and fundraisers each year. He was even voted the first runner up in the 2013 Dancing with the Desert Stars fundraiser for Desert AIDS Project.

An entrepreneurial executive for 29 years, Tony started his career in Chicago where he opened Rhumba Brazilian, a top rated restaurant and two high profile night clubs. He has also served as director with two Chicago non-profit boards the Howard Brown Memorial Clinic and Stop AIDS Chicago.

The Spirit of Stonewall Volunteer of the Year Award recognizes individuals for outstanding contributions to the betterment of our community through their volunteer efforts. The 2014 Volunteers of the Year are **Pennie L. Feehan** and **Gordon Elkins**.

Pennie L. Feehan knew at an early age that she was a lesbian and her path in life would look much different than her female role models. She is a pioneer in the plumbing industry and in the field of code inspections. A woman who chose to work in a male-dominated occupation, Pennie began her career at a chemical refinery as a pipe welder/fitter.

Her activism has spanned forty-two years, from marching for gay rights in Los Angeles in April 1971 to being invited to join the board of directors of the LGBT Community Center of the Desert in 2013.

Pennie is recognized for being instrumental in helping to bring diversity to the lesbian community. She seeks out women of various backgrounds for events she hosts and is a steady presence in both the African-American and white lesbian communities. She is a member of a group of women who have formed L-Fund, a Coachella Valley non-profit organization that raises money and helps lesbians in need and she is the volunteer organizer of Girls Night Out, a group of women who meet monthly at local desert venues for friendship and camaraderie.

Pennie fell in love with the Palm Springs area in 2003, and made it her permanent residence in 2005 after retiring from the City of Oakland.

Gordon Elkins is recognized for his work with LGBTIQ youth and his commitment to provide a voice for LGBTIQ youth in foster care. He serves as a case manager and program coordinator for Court Appointed Special Advocates for youth in foster care for Riverside County (CASA).

In 2010, Gordon completed CASA's 30-hour training to become a sworn officer of the Dependency Court. He later became the first gay CASA nationwide to be matched with a gay foster teen. He also serves on the Community Advisory Committee for Palm Springs Sanctuary, which is scheduled to become Riverside County's first gender-neutral group home serving LGBTIQ foster youth.

Gordon first arrived in Palm Springs from the Midwest in the early 1980's and immediately started to share his talents with local organizations. He became active on the board of directors for Desert Community Outreach, the first gay & lesbian community center and hotline in the Coachella Valley. He also served on the organizing committee for the Desert AIDS Project. In 1985, he moved to San Francisco where he was an active volunteer for a number of organizations.

He returned to Palm Springs full-time in 2005, where he volunteered to help the new Sisters Mission in the desert become a fully professed Order in The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

The Friend of Pride Award recognizes an individual or couple, who does not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, but who has energetically supported the LGBT community over an extended period of years and/or has made an exceptional contribution in the past year.

The 2014 Friend of Pride Award is presented to **Tori St. Johns** for eighteen years of service and support of youth in the community and through the Student Assistance Program at Desert Sands Unified School District (DSUSD). She is very involved in the formation and activities of the gay-straight alliance clubs (GSA) at five high schools in the DSUSD and with other GSA's in the Coachella Valley and neighboring communities and counties.

Tori was one of the original founders of Gay Associated Youth in 1998. Currently, she is on the board of Safe Schools Desert Cities which facilitates the Rainbow Youth Summit at DSUSD, Pride Prom, an online book lending site for LGBT school approved literature, Palm Springs Pride Youth Zone, and other LGBTQIA leadership trainings.

Tori received the 2012 Exceptional Services Award from Palm Springs Equality California, and the Pillar of the Community award from the City of La Quinta. For the past twenty years she has served on the Riverside County Substance Abuse Advisory Board and she is a sought after speaker at conferences and for middle and high school counselors on the topics of LGBT 101, current laws, and bully prevention.

Tori St. Johns has been happily married to Werner Boettcher for the past twenty-nine years. She has three children and three grandchildren. She's also a proud great grandmother. Her loveable dogs Rexx and Chewy Vuitton round out her family.

The Special Guest Award is bestowed on individuals who have enriched our lives through activism, inspiration, philanthropy or arts and culture. Truly an inspiration in our community, the 2014 Spirit of Stonewall Special Guest is **Judge Victoria Kolakowski**, the first openly transgender trial judge in the United States.

Since coming out publicly in 1989, she has been a leader in numerous local, state and national LGBT legal, political and spiritual organizations. She was elected to serve as a judge on the Alameda County Superior Court in November 2010. The election garnered headlines around the world and reinforced Judge Kolakowski's position as a role model for transgender people.

Judge Kolakowski was an attorney for twenty-one years in Louisiana and California, serving as a sole practitioner, attorney in a small firm, as general counsel for a publicly traded company, as a senior government utility regulatory attorney, and as an administrative law judge for two different California agencies.

Her many accomplishments include co-authoring Berkeley, California's domestic partner public registration ordinance in 1991 and co-chairing the board of directors of the Transgender Law Center, an organization focused on the well-being and protection of transgender individuals.

In 2011, Judge Kolakowski served as a Community Grand Marshal for San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride and was named by the Equality Forum as one of 31 international Icons for LGBT History Month. She was honored in Palm Springs on November 23, 2013, receiving an award from the Transgender Law Center and having the day declared named in her honor by Mayor Steve Pougnet. This year, she received the first "Pioneer in the Law Award" from California Women Lawyers and was the honored guest at Transgender Equality Network Ireland's reception at Dublin Pride.

Community Grand Marshal **Alexis Ortega** is a Palm Springs native who graduated with a BA in Economics at Stanford University in 2009 where she was heavily involved in campus LGBT groups. After Prop 8 passed,

she helped organize National Marriage Boycott, a student-led movement of allies and LGBTQ people that pledged not to marry until full federal marriage equality became the law of the land.

She has a passion for LGBT causes and has served on the Harvey Milk Diversity Breakfast Coalition Committee for the past two years. Alexis has helped organize local lesbian and queer women's events and in 2013 she and a few colleagues showed their philanthropic power and hosted the official ladies' party of Pride Weekend. The party was a huge success and the top fundraiser for Greater Palm Springs Pride. Alexis is also a member of the Leadership Coachella Valley Class of 2014 and was recently elected to serve on the board of directors.

Since 2010, Alexis has poured her energy into bringing Desert AIDS Project in the digital age as part of the Marketing & Communications team. She resides in Palm Springs, CA with her partner of three years, Desiree Musick.

Community Grand Marshal **Thomas Smith** is recognized for thirty years of community service which includes being active in projects to provide books for elementary students, organizing a prom for youth with disabilities and raising funds for student scholarships, the senior citizens center, and community musical concerts. He has been a high school mentor and advisory board member of the Palm Springs High School Business Academy and currently he is serving as president of the Rotary Club of Palm Springs.

Thomas is an award winning author in the International Book Awards for 2014 and 2013; and the USA Best Book Awards in 2013. Other honors include the 2014 Presidential Call to Service Award in recognition of 4,000 hours of volunteer service, the 2014 Leathertarian Lifetime Award for having a long standing record of good work and service in the leather and fetish community, and the President's Award from Pantheon of Leather in 2000 and the Southeast Regional Pantheon of Leather Award in 2011.